

b.) Claims

1. (Currently Amended) A method for the reduction of fouling of process components within a liquid hydrocarbon stream comprising the steps of:

applying an electric charge to an object within the flow path of ~~a fluid~~ said liquid hydrocarbon stream, wherein said ~~fluid~~ liquid hydrocarbon stream contains contaminants;

flowing said ~~fluid~~ liquid hydrocarbon stream past said electric charge; and,

adjusting the magnitude of said electric charge while continuing said flowing step.

2. (Withdrawn) The method according to Claim 1, wherein said step of applying an electric charge to an object comprises applying an electric charge to an object upstream to downstream of a heat exchanger.

3. (Withdrawn) The method according to Claim 2, wherein said step of applying an electric charge to an object upstream of a heat exchanger comprises applying an electric charge to an auxiliary device immediately upstream of a heat exchanger.

4. (Withdrawn) The method according to Claim 3 wherein said step of applying an electric charge to an auxiliary device immediately upstream of a heat exchanger comprises applying an electric charge to an object selected from the group consisting of a vessel, a section of pipe, and a spare heat exchanger.

5. (Original) The method according to Claim 1, wherein said step of applying an electric charge to an object comprises applying an electric charge to a heat exchanger.

6. (Original) The method according to Claim 5, wherein said step of applying an electric charge to a heat exchanger comprises applying an electric charge to the chassis or shell of said heat exchanger.

7. (Withdrawn) The method according to Claim 5, wherein said step of applying an electric charge to a heat exchanger comprises applying an electric charge to baffles of said heat exchanger.

8. (Withdrawn) The method according to Claim 5, wherein said step of applying an electric charge to a heat exchanger comprises applying an electric charge to a floating head of said heat exchanger.

9. (Withdrawn) The method according to Claim 5 wherein said step of applying an electric charge to a heat exchanger comprises applying an electric charge to one or more tubes or to the tube bundle of said heat exchanger.

10. (Withdrawn) The method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of applying an electric charge to an object comprises applying an electric charge to a slurry settler.

11. (Withdrawn) The method according to Claim 10 wherein said step of applying an electric charge to a slurry settler comprises applying an electric charge to the conical section of a slurry settler.

12. (Original) The method of Claim 1 wherein said step of applying an electric charge comprises applying a constant electric charge.

13. (Withdrawn) The method of Claim 1 wherein said step of applying an electric charge comprises applying a modulated electric charge.

14. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 1, further comprising determining the level of contaminants in the ~~fluid~~ liquid hydrocarbon stream.

15. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 14 wherein said step of determining utilizes measurement of the turbidity of the fluid stream or an analytical measurement indicative of contaminant concentration of the ~~fluid~~ liquid hydrocarbon stream.

16. (Withdrawn) The method of Claim 1 wherein said step of applying an electric charge comprises applying an attractive electric charge.

17. (Withdrawn) The method of Claim 1 wherein said step of applying an electric charge comprises applying a repulsive electric charge.

18-26. (Canceled).

27. (New) A method for improved hydrocarbon refining efficiency comprising the steps of:

catalytically cracking a liquid hydrocarbon mixture to produce an output mixture enhanced in low molecular weight liquid hydrocarbons relative to said hydrocarbon mixture;

separating by distillation said output mixture into petroleum fractions;

drawing a liquid hydrocarbon stream from said petroleum fractions;

flowing said liquid hydrocarbon stream through a heat exchanger;

repeating said step of separating or said steps of catalytically cracking and separating on said liquid hydrocarbon stream;

applying an electric charge to an object within the flow path of said liquid hydrocarbon stream;

flowing said liquid hydrocarbon stream past said electric charge; and,

adjusting the magnitude of said electric charge while continuing said flowing step.

28. (New) An improved hydrocarbon refining apparatus comprising:

a catalytic cracking unit to receive a liquid hydrocarbon mixture;

a distillation column fluidly coupled to said catalytic cracking unit and receiving the output of said catalytic cracking unit;

a heat exchanger fluidly coupled to said distillation column and receiving at least a part of the output of distillation column;

a voltage source in electrical contact with a component of said apparatus within the flow stream of said receiving at least a part of the output of distillation column.